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ABSTRACT

This paper identifies and reviews successful parent involvement programs for language minority parents of elementary school through secondary school children that could serve as a basis for the development of a home-school partnership model. Following an introduction, chapter 1, "Setting the Stage," provides a rationale for involving language-minority parents in their children's schooling and discusses obstacles to language minority parent involvement. Chapter 2, "What Are Possible Roles for Parents?", provides an overview of the different ways in which parents can be involved, covering audience, unseen partner, parent education, parents as teachers, parents as support resources, parents in governance and policy making, the focus of parent involvement, the structure of parent involvement, educational level of parents as a factor, and changing involvement at different grade levels. Chapter 3, "Effectiveness of Parent Involvement Programs," addresses the issue of why language-minority parents should become involved with their children's schooling, reviewing research that documents the importance of parent involvement to parents, teachers, and children. Chapter 4, "Creating a Home School Partnership," notes that little research has been done on some aspects of this issue and reviews research concerning characteristics of successful parent involvement programs. Included is a 98-item bibliography. (JB)

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LANGUAGE MINORITY PARENTS AND THE SCHOOL: CAN HOME-SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS INCREASE STUDENT SUCCESS?

BY

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LANGUAGE MINORITY PARENTS AND THE SCHOOL: CAN HOME-SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS INCREASE STUDENT SUCCESS?

Introduction

A successful educational program can best be realized when parents and school personnel cooperate with one another to provide children with a supportive educational environment. Recognizing the critical need for this kind of collaboration, the California State Department's current educational reform efforts include a call for a partnership between the home and school. At the national level, there has also been an increased interest in the participation of parents in their children's schooling. For example, the Even Start program, originated in 1989, is a federal attempt to improve children's school achievement through parent education and involvement.

A home-school partnership requires a common purpose and a mutual understanding between parents and school personnel. Parents of Limited-English-Proficient (LEP) students in particular need to know the educational options available to their children, what educators can and cannot do, as well as how they can support and reinforce their children's learning at home. Parents can obtain this information only from school personnel. School personnel, on the other hand, need to understand, respect, and create instructional program that recognize the contributions, concerns, and aspirations of language minority parents for their children. School personnel can obtain necessary information only from parents. The process of sharing this information forges a partnership between parents and teachers.

Programs to train parents have been developed and implemented in some schools for twenty years. Nonetheless, most educators don't know the techniques and procedures for facilitating home-school partnerships because these skills are not generally a part of the professional training of educators. They are acquired largely by work experience. The opportunity to learn these skills on-the-job, however, depends upon the extent to which the district and school site have personnel interested in offering parent training activities. Since the number of educators with such experience is limited, an alternative program is needed to develop such skills among educators.

This paper identifies and reviews successful parent involvement programs for language minority parents that could serve as a basis for the development of a home-school partnership model. The discussion is organized around the following four questions:

1. Why should language minority parents be involved in schools?
2. How effective are parent involvement programs for language-minority parents?
3. In what ways can language minority parents be involved in schools?

4. What are the basic components of a successful parent involvement program for language minority parents?

Chapter 1
SETTING THE STAGE

The success of the home-school partnership

Children enjoy school more and succeed more easily when there is a well-developed partnership between parents and teachers. A successful partnership between teachers and parents is founded on mutual respect for their different contributions and spheres of authority, shared information, and a common commitment to student success.

Parents can participate in one of two ways. The more visible way is to work at the school as aides, advisors, tutors, guest speakers, chaperons, fund raisers, committee members, or any other capacity that can provide support to the school. Parental involvement in this way strengthens the educational programs and benefits all students. It also links the school and the community in ways that may be especially important for minority children, who would otherwise experience school as a culturally different place and feel estranged from the community.

Parents can also participate less visibly but with greater impact on student achievement. They can work at home with their own children in ways that support the school program. They may supervise their children's homework, tutor, listen to their children read, and complete school-prepared instructional activities with the child.

Involving parents in their own children's learning is the most promising approach for several reasons. Because more mothers of school-age children are working and because of the increase in single parent households, fewer parents are available to come to help in the classroom on a regular basis or serve on committees. However, with very few exceptions, all parents want their children to succeed and can usually find a few minutes a day to help them. When parents volunteer at school, they help the schools which their children attend, but when parents engage in home learning activities, they help their children more directly.

Parents as teachers. Programs that provide organized ways for parents to work with their own children can increase student achievement (Henderson, Marburger, and Ooms, 1986; Rich, 1987). One organization with extensive national experience in facilitating the role of parents as teachers of their own children is the Home School Institute. During the last twenty years, the institute has organized a number of projects in which teachers provide home learning activities for parents and children to do together (Rich, 1987). The home learning activities complement regular classwork, focusing on the skills, attitudes, and habits students need to succeed at school, such as problem solving and perseverance.

Evidence shows that students who completed home learning activities performed better on standardized tests than students who did not. One such project, which the Los Angeles Unified School District later adopted, served 5000 Black and Hispanic students in kindergarten through the third grade by means of a parent-to-parent home education program. The students showed greater than expected achievement when tested with the California Test of Basic Skills (CTBS) in the second and third grades. Between 72 to 90 percent of the parents participated in the home learning activities. Their enthusiasm is equally impressive. Parents reported that they and their children both had learned something useful, and they felt more confident about helping their children. Participation of non-English-speaking parents, which is usually low, was almost 90 percent for one project, which translated home-learning activities into four languages.

Other programs have used similar approaches. Project Piaget (Martinez, 1982) in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, taught Piaget-based language learning principles to Hispanic parents and provided home learning activities. The Parents Assisting in Learning (PAL) project in Broward County, Florida, offered parents classes on tutoring skills that they could use with their own children (Garcia, 1986; Sandoval, et. al., 1986). Numerous reading improvement programs have parents listen to their children read or conduct other reading activities with them (Topping and Wolfendale, 1985).

All of the programs listed above found that when parents were involved in home learning activities with their children, the achievement of their children improved significantly.

Parents in other roles. However, parent involvement in various support roles in the school can also benefit student performance. One study of the Follow Through Program concluded that all forms of parent participation help student achievement (Gordon, 1978). According to this study, parent participation has a greater effect if parents play a variety of roles over a period of time. Goodson and Hess (1975) theorized that parents who participate in school decision-making develop a self-esteem that carries over into other areas and benefits the family more directly. Cummins (1986), among others, proposes that a school that invites participation from parents of a minority community, while respecting that community's language and culture, will have a positive effect on the achievement of minority students at that school.

Relationship between schools and language minority families

While there is a renewed interest in the ways families and schools can work together, we are concerned particularly with the involvement of parents of language minority families. It is important for schools to find ways of working with language minority families for a number of reasons. First, the immigration of the last decade has resulted in large increases in the numbers of students and families whose first language is not English. In many districts, this group is now a significant

constituency. Second, the concern with the disproportionate school failure of minority children, in which group many language minority children are included, has prompted a renewed exploration of new models and strategies, among which parent involvement is one of the more promising. Finally, while language minority parents have the same needs as native born parents, they do not have the same reservoir of experience and information to draw upon. In order for an effective partnership to be formed between immigrant parents and the schools, the parents need to understand what the schools are about, and the schools are the most likely source of that information.

History of the involvement of language minority parents. Many of the educational programs with required parent involvement components such as Headstart, Title I, and bilingual education had their origin in the Great Society era of the 1960's, during which education was seen as a means to eradicate poverty and inequality. From the beginning, bilingual education programs required a parent advisory council; Headstart programs included parent education components. Despite the obvious altruism of these programs, many of the parent involvement activities rested on the assumption that low-income homes were deficient in preparing children for success in school, a view that is no longer accepted unquestioningly (Goodson, 1975).

At the same time, the educational system was forever changed by activist parents and communities with agendas such as desegregation or adequate education for language minority students. The Lau vs. Nichols case, initiated by parent and community groups, provided a national legal basis for bilingual education.

The division of educational responsibility in the partnership between parents and school has never been comfortably solved. At times each side is uncomfortable with the actions of the other, and the most desirable situation would be a partnership with mutually acceptable roles for both parents and educators.

Parent involvement legislated by Title VII. Rodriguez (1979) conducted a study of parent participation in bilingual programs from 1968 to 1978. He notes three separate stages of parent participation which correspond to different sets of legislation and federal directives (see Figure 1). The original Title VII legislation in 1968 required school districts to form an advisory committee as a condition for receiving funds but failed to specify a purpose or a legal basis for the committee. Rodriguez concluded that the committee either placated community or federal requirements, or rubber stamped what the school decided should be done.

A second stage began with the 1971 federal guidelines for Title VII which spelled out the roles of parent advisory committees more specifically. Parents and the community were to be consulted in the planning of bilingual programs because it was assumed that they had information not otherwise available to the school district about

community needs. Rodriguez calls this more active and participatory stage the information role.

The reauthorization of Title VII, passed in 1974, strengthened the role of parents even further. It mandated a district wide advisory committee, a majority of whose members were required to be parents of children to be served. The committee was not only set the task of planning the program but also of implementing and evaluating it. It had to call public hearings prior to submission of proposals to the federal government. In addition, funds were provided to enable parents to attend local, state, and national conferences. Because of the two-way exchange of information and the greater power accorded parents, Rodriguez calls this the checks and balances stage.

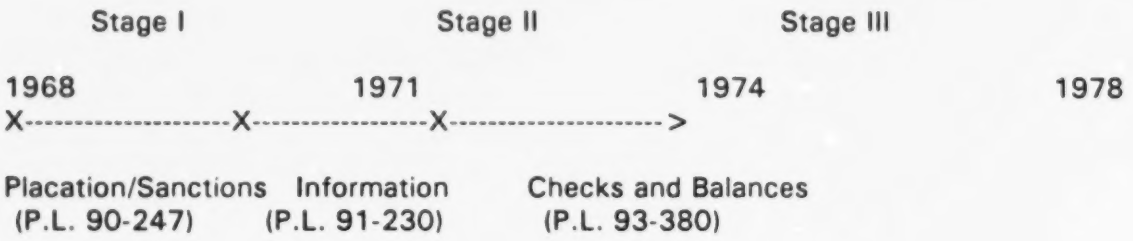

Figure 1

Legal requirements for parent participation are still in place today, but strong federal leadership in bilingual education has diminished. Rather than continuing the trend of getting greater parent involvement in school programs, the U.S. Department of Education has encouraged parents to be "partners in the home" (Davenport, 1985). The widely distributed and popularly written document *What Works* (U.S. Department of Education, 1986) encourages parents to read to their children, practice math skills, talk about school activities, and monitor homework.

Extent of parent participation in Title VII programs. Even with a legal mandate for more than a decade, parent participation in Title VII is limited. A national study of parent involvement in Title VII programs found that although all sites had parent advisory councils, the councils did not have a significant role in project decisions (Cardena-Munoz and Keesling, 1981). While most sites had some sort of parent education, as well as organized ways for parents to provide support for the school, the extent of these activities varied a great deal. Even activities that encouraged parents to teach their children at home and that required communication between parents and schools were found only in a minority of sites. The lack of parent involvement among these programs is surprising, given the availability of staff who speak the same language as the parents and the legal mandate to involve parents and community.

OBSTACLES TO LANGUAGE MINORITY PARENT INVOLVEMENT

According to school officials and to leaders in their own communities, language minority parents are the least likely to participate in the schools in any organized way. Collier (1986) contrasts the situation of minority and majority parents in relation to school involvement.

> Majority parents have greater access to the possibility of participating in school decision-making. Majority parents are largely middle-class in background. They have more control over political and economic resources than minority parents. The school program is designed to serve the needs of majority children. Their first language is standard English, the prestigious language of the society, with institutional support. Majority parents' language and cultural identity is developed and maintained at school (Dolson, 1985)....
>
> In contrast to majority parents, language minority parents have much less access to control of resources. They may not yet be proficient in English, the language they need for access to resources and potential influence on school decision-making. Their first language is a subordinate language which is undervalued in the U.S. and has little institutional support (Dolson, 1985). They may feel strongly that their children are acquiring unacceptable and immoral values at school (Bui Duc Ton, 1978). They may want to take an active role in the direction of their children's educational development or they may prefer to rely on the authority of school personnel to decide what is best for their children. Most of all, language minority parents want their children to succeed academically and yet some are aware that some minorities continue to experience persistent disproportionate school failure (Ogbu and Matute-Bianchi, 1986). They want to change this pattern. Some preliterate parents feel the most powerless of all.

Clearly in situations where language minority and native born parents are invited to participate in activities together, the native English speakers will be able to have much more effect on the school system and be able to extract from it what they need. In contrast, language minority parents lack English skills and have limited access to information. They may not know how the school system is organized and what makes it work (Sandoval, 1986; Thien and Duong, 1986), or even what kind of participation is expected in American schools (Redding, 1986). Effective problem solving on behalf of their children is therefore nearly impossible. At higher grade levels, parents find it difficult to guide their children in course selection and preparation for employment or further education, particularly if they themselves have not completed high school in the United States and are unfamiliar with the labor market.

Like English-speaking parents, language minority parents are not likely to be available to the schools because of the demands of work and family. It is not uncommon for language minority parents to hold more than one job or to work at night. In addition, lower income and a greater number of children per family create additional obstacles to attending school meetings. Issues such as transportation and childcare become insurmountable. Finally, the way that schools have treated parents have sometimes contributed to the problem. If school staffs subscribe to the deficit model, they convey to parents that they are lacking something and are doing something wrong. Parents who are made to feel like failures are not likely to seek further involvement with the schools.

What do language minority parents need?

Language minority parents have the same general needs that other parents have. For Rich (1987), all parents need to have their confidence restored after years of being told that they don't know what they are doing. It will require more planning and work to communicate with, encourage, and provide confidence to parents who may not speak English or have the same base of information as school staff.

Communication they can understand. Obviously a parent participation program needs to be organized in a language that parents understand. Written information will need to be translated if the population is literate, and translators must be available for all meetings. Care should be taken with translations as some concepts will be misunderstood if they are simply translated without proper explanation, such as the idea of "special education." Even when parents understand English, school staff should make language simple and concrete and avoid the use of educational jargon. It is possible to conduct meetings in a way that topics are explained simply and summarized on easel pads. Information can be presented orally, and any printed materials can be kept as simple as possible (Davenport, 1985).

Respect. All parents regardless of background and level of education have something to teach and a contribution to make (Rich, 1987). Parents want respect for their individual background and experience. They want to be treated like important people in their children's lives.

Minorities are still largely in a position of powerlessness within American society. Immigrants are often minorities who have even less power due to lack of language, money, and social power base. According to Cummins (1986), if nothing is done to counter the status quo, the schools contribute to the domination of minority communities by denying and ignoring the culture, language, and contribution of the community. Therefore, schools must actively acknowledge and respect the parents' culture and make a place for it in the school, so that the dominant culture is not totally overwhelming. Only then can parents hope to meet school staff with some measure of equality.

Information about the educational system. Language minority parents need basic information about the American educational system including the role and expectations of the teacher and expected roles of parents. Without a basic understanding of the system, immigrant parents will assume that the schools are similar to the ones they attended in their home country. In fact, there are important differences between the American education system and the school systems in Latin America or Southeast Asia, such as the roles of parents and the options available for students (Douglas, 1986).

Parents also need to understand the teacher's perspective just as the teacher needs to understand that of parents. Despite these differences, parents and teachers have a lot in common (Rich, 1987). Yet, in order to overcome what may seem like an overwhelming strangeness, parents will be more comfortable if they can develop a personal relationship with some school staff.

Reassurance that they can contribute to their children's educational experience and information on how to do this. The new thinking about parent involvement stresses the positive. All parents, whether they realize it or not, contribute in positive ways to their children's education (Rich, 1987). Schools need to emphasize these contributions rather than call attention to deficiencies and inadequacies. Although the role of parents needs to be more fully acknowledged by the school, parents have a lot to learn from educators. Parents need to learn what educators know about how parents can help their children. For English-speaking parents who share a common cultural and educational experience with the school staff, communicating this information is relatively easy. Much more work is required to share information with parents of a different language and culture.

Conclusion. This chapter has shown that language minority parents need respect, information about the educational system, reassurance by the schools that they can contribute in important ways to their children's educational experience, and practical training in how to do so. We turn now to a discussion of the various ways in which parents can become involved.

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Chapter 2
WHAT ARE POSSIBLE ROLES FOR PARENTS?

Almost everyone thinks that parent involvement in the schools and in their children's education is good and necessary, yet what is meant by such involvement is by no means clear. One sometimes gets the impression that the goal of parent participation is simply the idea of parent participation, or as a researcher into parent advisory groups stated, "The principal may see the formation and existence of the advisory group as an end in itself" (Heck, 1977 p.132). Failing to define specific roles for parent involvement can result in meaningless and circular efforts. This chapter will discuss the various roles that parents can play in the education of their children.

Parents can play many roles, from watching the school play to serving on the school board, from helping their own children complete an assignment to speaking to the history class, from making financial contributions to a fundraiser to serving on the committee that organized the fundraiser. Some roles are more visible than others but have an indirect impact upon student success, such as when a parent committee seeks to change the textbooks used in the literature class. Other roles, are less visible but may relate more directly to student success, such as when a father listens to his child read.

The motivation of parents to serve in different roles varies according to their interests and abilities. All parents can play some roles whereas other roles require specialized skills and knowledge. Also, parental involvement changes in response to changing student needs. Typically, parents are physically present in school more often during the first three of four years of their children's schooling and all but disappear as the students enter high school.

Parental roles can be organized on a continuum within one of several dimensions, for example, their degree of activity. On one end of the continuum, parents can passively receive communications from the school; on the other end they can initiate reform in the schools. Other dimensions reveal the degree to which parents help their own children in particular ways, such as helping in the class or at the school, whether parents are working independently or in cooperation with others, the degree of specialized knowledge or training that is required for each kind of involvement, and the grade level of the children involved. Each of these dimensions will be discussed in turn.

1. What roles do parents play in their children's education?

The following paragraphs summarize the literature about possible parent roles, ranging from the most passive to the most active.

Audience. At the passive end of the continuum, all parents are an audience for the school's performance (Henderson, Marburger, and Ooms, 1986). In this role, they may observe classes or merely hear about them. They may attend meetings and merely listen to the information provided, or they may attend school plays and productions. Rich (1987) identifies another role--that of parents as receivers of memos about schedules, events, report cards, lunch menus and other aspects of the school's activities.

Sometimes communication from the school to the parents has a goal that is more than merely informative. Fantini (1974) calls this kind of communication public relations and categorizes it as a rather manipulative and highly controlled flow of information to passively receptive parents. A similar category, which Cardena-Munoz and Keesling (1981) call school-community relations, consists of activities initiated by the school to foster and improve interpersonal relations among parents and staff members. Cardena-Munoz and Keesling found that Title VII projects varied a great deal in the quantity and quality of the activities conducted in this category.

Unseen partner. A more active but still largely unrecognized role is what parents do on a daily basis to make the school's work possible. Henderson, Marburger, and Ooms (1986) call this the school partner role although in reality it is an unseen home-school partnership rather than one that is consciously developed between school staff and parents. In the elementary grades, considerable parental effort is involved to organize children's lives so that they miraculously appear in the classroom at the appointed time. Many parents continue to provide a great deal of active support even at the secondary level. Notes are signed, lunches prepared, school clothes and supplies are bought, medical vaccinations are obtained, and students are awakened and shepherded to school. Obviously, this is one level of parent involvement that is nearly universal.

Parent education. Parents have always had an impact on their children's education through activities such as socialization, discipline, informal instruction, and cultural transmission. Schools can assist parents in performing these outside tasks by offering workshops, classes, or even one-to-one assistance. The theory is that if parents receive classes or information on topics such as nutrition and child development, they will be better parents (Goodson and Hess, 1975). Cardena-Munoz and Keesling (1981) found in their study of Title VII projects that all projects in the study had some form of parent education ranging from one-shot workshops to ongoing classes, including educational activities that only indirectly relate to parenting, such as classes in English, which opens the door to many other parent involvement activities.

Other program developers concerned particularly with low-income and immigrant parents, contend that if parents are to find their interaction with the school at all meaningful, the schools must assess parent needs very broadly and help them meet those needs (Landerholm and Kahr, 1988). These needs may be as basic as food,

employment, counseling for refugees from war-torn countries, and referral to other services (Garate, 1986).

Parent education has existed in various forms since the early 1900's, but it became a component of many programs concerned with educational equity that have been developed during the last twenty years. Research on early childhood education has called attention to the importance of the cognitive development that takes place during the first four years of life and has provided the rationale for large scale efforts in parent education. Usually, programs are designed to serve parents who have a limited formal education, a low-income, or an otherwise restricted access to resources. One example is the Avance program in San Antonio, Texas, which provides classes and a support system to Mexican-American mothers of preschoolers who are at risk of abuse or neglect (Cortez, 1986). The Parents Assisting in Learning (PAL) project, a cooperative venture between Florida International University and Broward County, teaches parenting skills to parents of school age children (Garcia, 1986). Other models, such Project Home Base, developed in Yakima, Washington, during the 1970's, require staff to visit participating families at home and provide them with activities and in some cases equipment that prepare youngsters for school (Berger, 1987). The thrust of many of these parent education programs is to encourage parents in their role as teachers of their own children.

Parents as teachers of their own children. Parents can actively teach their children at home. There is a growing body of research and anecdotal evidence that programs that systematically involve parents as teachers of their own children can increase school achievement (Rich, 1987; Henderson, Marburger, and Ooms, 1986). If this teaching takes place at home and is not coordinated with any school program, it remains largely invisible. However, some programs do provide activities for parents to do at home, train parents to work with their children, and sometimes provide staff to work with parents in their homes. Many programs, such as Project Home Base described above, combine parent education and the encouragement of parents as teachers of their own children. Project PIAGET in Bethlehem Pennsylvania not only taught parents activities they could do with their children to enhance language development but taught them the theory behind the activities (Martinez, 1982). A national organization which fosters the idea of parents as teachers is the Home School Institute in Washington, D.C.

Many authorities recognize the parent's role as home teacher (Goodson and Hess, 1975). Henderson, Marburger and Ooms (1986), Rich (1986), and a scattering of others prove that this model works even with a language minority population. One of the best examples is the Parents are Teachers in Any Language Project in which almost 90 percent of parents who participated completed home activities provided to them in four different languages (Rich, 1986). Nevertheless, relatively few schools and teachers actually use this approach. In the Cardena-Munoz and Keesling's study of Title VII sites (1981), only 3 of 13 sites collaborated with parents in this way.

Parents as collaborators and problem solvers. Parents can take an active role in their children's education by participating in the selection of an instructional program, attending meetings to discuss issues relating to their children, etc. Like the parent as invisible partners role, the collaboration and problem solving role is often overlooked by the schools (Henderson, Marburger and Ooms, 1986). This collaborating role becomes more critical as students become older. If collaborative relationships fail to develop between parents and school staff, the results can be students who are inappropriately placed, students with potential who are not adequately prepared for college, and students who drop out. Increased collaboration between school staff and parents is seen as crucial to increasing the number of Hispanic students who attend college (Ramon, 1985; Commission on Precollege Guidance and Counseling, 1986; Hispanic Policy Development Project, 1984). Parents need information from the schools to be effective collaborators, whether it's through workshops, newsletters, handbooks, or personal contacts. Bilingual Spanish and Vietnamese parent handbooks and workshop materials developed by Santa Clara County Office of Education are among the few materials available for the high school level (Douglas, 1986).

Parents as supporting resources. The more traditional and visible way for parents to cooperate with the schools is as a supporting resource. Some authors such as Cardena-Munoz and Keesling (1981) and Henderson, Marburger, and Ooms (1986) differentiate between instructional support, in which parents volunteer in the class or are hired as paid aides, and non-instructional support, in which parents perform other services. In either case the parent is working at the school, assisting in some way with the business of the school.

For Goodson and Hess (1975) the presence of parents reduces "the distance between home and school by bringing the family into the school environment." The presence of parents working at school is also an important tool for community relations and a way of developing support for the school and increasing understanding about school issues (Henderson, Marburger and Ooms, 1986). All of the Title VII projects studied by Cardena-Munoz and Keesling had organized ways for parents to support the project. The school and all students benefit from this kind of service although not all parents can participate in this way.

Governance and policy makers. The most active role for parents is to be involved in school decision-making or to otherwise influence the way the school conducts its business. Title VII programs require parent advisory groups, but many of these groups do not function in a decision-making capacity (Rodgriguez, 1979; Cardena-Munoz and Keesling, 1981). Because of the difficulty of finding parents involved in school governance or decision-making, some authorities (Rich, 1987) discount this kind of involvement as a viable parent role. However, others have studied the advisory council in all its variations and have found value. Rodriguez, for example, finds five possible roles for the advisory group:

1. placation--fulfilling requirements to have parent involvement.

2. sanctions--visible and respected members of the community provide support to a program that has already been designed by the school.

3. information--community/parent groups provide information about the population to be served and the type of approach that would be appropriate.

4. checks and balances--two way exchange of information between the school and community/parent groups with some power on each side.

5. change agent--the parent/community group brings about changes in the school, which they see as positive.

Rodriguez traced the evolution of Title VII legislation from requiring parent participation in a placation/sanctions role to an information role and finally to a checks and balances role. Though he found committees functioning at these four levels, he states, "There was little evidence ...that attempts were made by school districts to train community people to be effective collaborators in educational decision-making (Rodrigues, 1974, p.277)."

For some researchers on the subject, even token roles in school governance are beneficial because parents experience increased self-esteem, which in turn benefits their children (Goodson and Hess,1975; Cardena-Munoz and Keesling, 1981). Others feel that parent involvement, supposedly for the good of the parent, is counterproductive. As stated in a Stanford Research Institute (1973) report:

> Participation may be limited...because many parents feel that the school personnel perceive them as ignorant.... They feel they do not belong, and are looked down on. No person eagerly participates in a program which communicates his deficiencies to him.

If parents cannot influence schools in a manner organized by the schools, they can organize themselves independent of the school system. Fantini (1974) lists two ways that parents can have a role in education outside of the system: 1) application of legal resources and 2) citizen and consumer lobbies for education. The many suits brought against school districts, some of which have had lasting impact on the Education Code, have illustrated the use of legal resources. In addition, several citizen/consumer groups exist at the national level. The National Committee for Citizens in Education in Columbia, Maryland, for example, provides a toll free number to answer parents' questions in English and Spanish. The Committee assists local parent groups with school-related information by means of handbooks, a computerized data system, technical assistance and training sessions, and a monthly newsletter. They provide

basic information for parents on their rights, school programs such as special education, and post-secondary options for their children. They claim to have responded to approximately 15,000 requests from parents in the last five years. Another organization, the Boston based Institute for Responsive Education, focuses mainly on assisting communities to become more involved in decision-making in their local schools. They provide publications, document promising practices, convene conferences and offer technical assistance.

One example of a local group is the Instituto de Padres (Parent Institute) in San Diego. This citizen group receives funding from the private sector to work with parents of elementary and junior high school students. Working with three schools at a time, they offer a series of six 90 minute workshops based on a needs assessment of each community. They have been successful in getting as many as 30 and 40 percent of Hispanic households of one school to attend meetings. In one year, 1077 individuals completed a full cycle of workshops (Mardirosian, V., 1989).

Conclusion. The majority of parent participation activities are either passive or are structured by the school. Parents initiate very few activities although some organizations support parent initiative at the national and local level. There is a mistaken belief that because parents do not initiate, they are not involved. Most parents, especially at the elementary level, engage in daily activities that support the school's efforts with their children. This supportive involvement should be acknowledged and school staff should extend this working partnership with parents to include instruction, guidance, and other activities that affect student success.

2. Should parent involvement activities help parents to work with their own children or should they have a more general focus?

Parent involvolvement often means parents work directly with their own children, as for example when they function as audience, unseen partners, teachers of their own children, or collaborators and problem solvers. However, parents' efforts can also move away from their children to a larger and more general sphere. As supporting resources, they can work in ways that benefit their children's classrooms, specific programs like bilingual education, or their children's schools. If parents become involved in school governance, their responsibilities are to the district at large. Finally, parents who become lobbyists for education work beyond the district to affect the way education is conducted in our society.

Parents working with their own children. The research shows that programs that provide organized ways for parents to work with their own children can increase student achievement (Henderson, Marburger and Ooms, 1986. Rich, 1987). Achievement in reading, a key skill learned in the first few years of school, can be improved by additional practice at home. Some school programs also provide organized activities that involve other school subjects, or that encourage problem

solving, study skills, and the development of other qualities associated with successful students.

At the secondary level, cooperation between individual parents and students and the school staff is seen as crucial to successful educational and career planning (Ramon, 1985). For example, a vocationally oriented bilingual program in Arlington, Virginia, sent home bilingual activities for parents and students to do together. The content of the activities included information on and discussion of topics such as the importance of a diploma, career orientation and planning, preparing for a job interview, college options, and so on (Arlington County Public Schools, 1986). Students and parents share the information that they will need to make future decisions.

With the exception of special groups such as the unaccompanied minor refugees from Southeast Asia or children in protective custody, all parents can work with their children at home or in occasional school meetings. If schools are interested in reaching the greatest number of parents, it is through involvement with their own children that most parents will be willing to participate. If the school's goal is higher achievement and better performance, an organized partnership with parents is the best way to ensure that each child gets special attention.

Parents working at the school level and beyond. Parents who serve in the more traditional and visible roles as advisory group member or classroom volunteer benefit their children only indirectly. While many parents do not have the time or the inclination to participate, others are willing to share their knowledge, time, and resources. When parents serve as resources to the school or participate in governance, students, school staff, and parents benefit. Students experience a closer link between the two major arenas of their life: the school and the community (Cummins, 1986). School staff feel that they have the support of the community (Henderson, Marburger, and Ooms, 1986) and in addition they receive needed assistance. Community members and parents gain an understanding of the school by participating in it.

Some parents' interest in education extends beyond school walls to larger social issues, like special education or bilingual education, and they become citizen advocates. By working for a particular cause or project they are able to gain support, educate others, and provide services that would not otherwise be available.

Conclusion. Parent involvement serves different functions, all of which are beneficial. When parents' efforts to work with their own children are coordinated with the school's efforts, student achievement can increase. When parents volunteer in the school, serve on school committees, or are active in the larger community, those entities as well as the parents themselves benefit.

3. Should parents work cooperatively or independently?

When parents work with their own children or perform volunteer work for the school, they are often working independently. They may meet with the teacher or the guidance counselor but only to solve particular problems, not to deal with the larger issues. They may receive instructions about what to do with their children, but they perform the tasks within the four walls of their homes. On the other hand, parents who serve on committees, who participate in a parent education program, or who are involved in issues of policy work cooperatively with others and perform tasks that reach beyond the home.

Cooperation and Community Building. Independent work is efficient for carrying out tasks. If 500 children need to have an adult listen to them read, it is much more efficient to have a lot of independent workers perform this task. But if parents feel that they are the only ones to have a certain problem, if they feel intimidated by going to the school, if they are concerned about the direction the school program is taking and don't know what to do about it, independent effort is not the most effective approach. When parents work cooperatively they can identify common problems and concerns, and they will realize that they are not alone. As a group, they are more effective at presenting their concerns to school staff. And school staff and parents, again as a group, are in a better position than any individual to work out solutions. Only through dialogue and discussion can parents and educators develop a partnership that reflects the needs and concerns of both groups. Individual parents cannot develop this partnership and understanding on their own.

But building a partnership between the community and the school requires parents and teachers to be involved over a period of time. Communication is the key feature. According to Sumption and Engstrom communication must be district-wide and must "permit the community to know its schools and the schools to know their community (1974, p.31)." The process of communication is as important as the content in developing an understanding between different groups. The importance of this process is particularly visible in communities troubled by failure, racial tensions, or other problems. W. Fred Totten (1972) states:

> When people participate in groups on an equal basis some of the barriers of prejudice, bigotry, selfishness, and indifference melt away (in Sumption and Engstrom, 1974, p.54).

The process of communication is made more difficult when parents do not speak English, are unfamiliar with our traditions of citizen participation, or are illiterate. Individual problems have individual solutions. Meetings can be held in a language parents can understand, or one or several translators can be present. The location and time of meetings can be made convenient for parents. Childcare can be provided, and discussion can be largely oral with written materials available for those who request them. Discussion can also be summarized for the group in simple words on easel paper (Collier, 1986; Davenport, 1985; Bach-Tuyet, 1986).

Conclusion. While parents can and should be involved in the many tasks that they can carry out alone, a partnership between the school and the parent community needs some cooperative effort.

4. How much knowledge do parents need to be effective partners in their children's education with the schools?

We used to assume that students failed because parents didn't know what they were doing, and it is true that many immigrant and language minority parents do not have a first hand understanding of the American educational system. How can parents who don't read English help their children to do their homework? How can parents who have not negotiated the complexities of the American high school make sure that their children take the courses they need? How can parents who do not understand how the schools are organized and how they function find the right person to solve their children's problems?

The research of recent years suggests that all parents can have a positive effect on their children's educational experience. Rich (1987) describes how parents who have a limited knowledge of English can still help their children to learn at home. Parents are the first teachers and role models of their children and continue to play a significant role in their lives. Parents can exert this influence without access to the school's efforts in curriculum, skill development, guidance, and career development. When this parental influence is coordinated with the school's influence, the opportunities for positive impact are greatly multiplied.

In a multicultural society, we are beginning to recognize that knowledge is not one-dimensional. Parents who are unfamiliar with college requirements and have little formal education may be rich sources of information to the school on topics such as folk customs, geography, and history of their native country, or their particular occupational specialty--topics of which the classroom teacher may be totally ignorant. In order to make use of the knowledge that parents do have, school personnel need to develop ways of involving some parents not only in working with their own children but also in contributing to the school as resources people.

The school, therefore, should provide to parents the information that they need to be able to cooperate effectively with the school and help their children. School staff should find ways to communicate with parents in a language they can understand, which may require hiring bilingual staff, using aides, translating school communications to the parents, conducting meetings in the parents' language, minimizing educational jargon, and using a combination of oral and written communication (Garcia, Thien, and Duong, 1986). A needs assessment should be conducted regularly with parent groups since not all parents have the same needs and expectations. Some may be interested in understanding how the U.S. educational system works while others may need reassurance that they can help their children and

participate in their education even if they do not speak English. Many programs are concerned with getting parents to attend meetings of various kinds. Suggestions for increasing attendance of parents include making home visits, using the media, providing a clear explanation of purpose, persistence, providing childcare, and holding social events for parents to get to know each other and become familiar with the school (Garcia, 1986; Sen, 1986; Thien and Duong, 1986).

Conclusion. All parents can help their children to be successful in school. School personnel should work with parents so that they have the information and understanding that they need. Parents can also share their knowledge with school staff and children, thereby making a greater body of experience available to the students and helping to bridge the cultural gap which can exist between the school and the community. Given the complexity of the task, and the fact that in many schools parent involvement is nobody's job, it is not surprising that schools see this task as difficult. Parents, on the other hand, are not likely to attend meetings that do not fulfill their needs or are not comprehensible to them.

5. How should parents be involved at different grade levels?

Henderson, Marburger and Ooms (1986) conclude that parents are involved with schools at all levels as partners, collaborators, audience, supporters and advisors although as the students get older, parent participation declines. Berger (1987) considers different roles for parents to play at four different stages of child development: infancy, preschool, primary and intermediate grades, and secondary. Parents of infants can be involved in parent education programs, which teach them infant care, nutrition, and ways of stimulating their infants to further their development. Parents of preschoolers can participate in parent education, cooperative use of resources, like toy libraries, center-based programs, like Headstart and cooperative nurseries, or home-based programs that combine parent education with home visits. At the primary and the intermediate level, the level at which many educators focus their attention, parents can also participate significantly. They can teach their own children, make policy, and function as school resources. According to Berger, the secondary school sees a decline in parent involvement, but not necessarily in the need for it. At this stage, parents can play an important role in programs that provide teenagers with family education and drug education. They can also provide guidance in making the transition between school and work and help children find a meaningful use for their spare time.

The absence of a strong partnership between schools and parents at the secondary level is suspected of contributing to student dropouts, poor academic performance, and lack of preparation for postsecondary education. Several organizations concerned with the failure of minority and immigrant students have called for greater cooperation between parents and schools. The National Commission on Secondary Schooling for Hispanics (1984) conducted hearings for educators, students, parents and community

members around the country to determine reasons for the massive school failure of Hispanics and to make recommendations. One of their conclusions is that schools must reach out to parents of Hispanic students and involve them in their children's education. Another finding was that high school students need more access to adults since for various reasons parents are not always the best source of information on future options, career choices, and high school problems. According to Ramon (1985), parents are logical partners in providing college guidance to their children, but are often not in a position to do so unless they are involved in this task by the school. The Commission on Precollege Guidance and Counseling (1986), in an effort to increase college options for all students, stated that counselors can and should advise parents on the advantages and accessibility of college for their children.

Clearly, although the particular tasks may change, parents need to be involved from kindergarten through high school graduation. All of the possible parent roles discussed at the beginning of this chapter can apply at any level, except possibly the role of parents as teachers of their own children. Many parents who can listen to their first grader read cannot help the algebra student prepare for a test. However, parents can monitor students' study hours and help students develop study skills needed for academic achievement.

Conclusion. Parent involvement is needed at all grade levels. Parents can and should help their children by working with the school on the particular tasks that are appropriate to their children's level of development. For example, at the elementary level, parents may help their children develop basic skills while at the secondary level they may help their children navigate decisions about course selection and future career direction.

This chapter has addressed the question of how parents can participate in the schooling of their children. The next chapter addresses the question, Why should parents be involved with the schooling of their children? That is, what are the benefits of parent involvement?

Chapter 3
EFFECTIVENESS OF PARENT INVOLVEMENT PROGRAMS

Chapter 1 provided a rationale for involving language-minority parents in their children's schooling. Chapter 2 provided an overview of the different ways in which parents can be involved. This chapter addresses the issue of why parents of language-minority children should become involved with their children's schooling. This chapter reviews research that documents the importance of parent involvement to parents, teachers, and most importantly, children. Data are drawn from studies of parents who speak a minority language. Despite the significant number of low achieving language minority children in our current student population, little research is available on the involvement of their parents in school. The summary of what is known about involvement by language minority parents is followed by findings of the effectiveness of parent involvement programs in general that may be applicable to our language minority community. The chapter concludes with research implications about how language minority parents can help with the schooling of their children.

There is little information on language minority parent involvement. What is available suggests that, while language minority parents value education, they do not have positive attitudes towards schools and the services provided, and they do not tend to become involved with school. This estrangement between parents and school personnel comes from a lack of understanding and information between the two groups.

Educational aspirations. Chicano and Asian refugee mothers hold strong educational aspirations for their children (Carter & Segura, 1979; Vasquez, 1978; Caplan, 1985). However, Mexican-American parents do not hold as high expectations for their children with respect to occupational goals. This disparity may reflect in part the recognition by these parents that they do not have the means to pay for higher education (Phenice, et. al., 1986).

Attitudes toward school. In a study of how Mexican-American parents perceive parent and teacher roles in child development, Parra and Henderson (1982) found that Mexican-American parents are not pleased by how their children are being taught in schools. Parents feel that by ignoring the cultural background of their children, schools are not responsibly providing for the social and emotional development of their children. We noted earlier that there is also evidence that Asian refugee families are very concerned that their children are acquiring unacceptable and immoral values at school (Bui Duc Ton, 1978). Further, there is evidence that not only do Mexican-American children view their teachers as biased against them, but that this perception becomes stronger over time (Carter & Segura, 1979).

Parent-teacher roles. Mexican-American parents and educators do not have a common understanding of their respective roles and responsibilities. Mexican-

American parents believe that it is the teacher's responsibility, not theirs, to develop the intellectual skills of their children. As a result, they do not deliberately provide educational tasks for their children at home nor become actively involved in schools (Carter & Segura, 1979; Parra & Henderson, 1981; Stewart, 1981). Teachers interpret this lack of involvement in schools as a lack of concern for their children's education (Phenice, et. al., 1986).

Family factors also make it difficult for language-minority parents to prepare their children for school. Many of these parents have limited formal education (Carter & Segura, 1979; Parra & Henderson, 1981; Stewart, 1981). Language minority families use language in the home differently from the way teachers use language in the classroom (Heath, 1983). The combination of having different skills and experiences than those used and valued in classrooms makes it difficult for language minority parents to adequately prepare their children for school (Stewart, 1981). Consequently the children from language minority homes may not be as skilled in using language in the ways required by teachers and classroom activities.

Parra and Henderson found that "schools with middle-class values expect that basic intellectual abilities and academic motivation are developed in substantial degree in the home before children attend school (1981, p. 298)." Because the school fails to communicate adequately with the language minority community, Carter and Segura (1979) conclude that the average language minority family does not learn the necessary skills to prepare their children for school.

From another perspective, schools do not encourage language minority parents to become involved in a meaningful way (Nieto & Sinclair, 1980; Padilla, 1982). Those parents who have been involved in schools often perceive the school activities in which they are asked to participate as demeaning and unimportant (Carter & Segura, 1979; Nieto & Sinclair, 1980). The question arises, how can the schools effectively train language minority parents? Unfortunately, most of the research in this area has not separated the effect of parent training from other programmatic effects (Topping, 1986). That is, parent training programs for language minority families have generally occurred within the context of a larger intervention program, e.g. bilingual program, Chapter 1 program, etc., so that it is not possible to separate the effects of parent training from other services provided.

For example, one study examined the effects of combining Piagetian classroom activities with activities for parents to support classroom work at home. The goal was to provide 5-year-old language-minority children with English language training while continuing to develop their primary language skills (Martinez, 1982). In another project pre-schoolers were placed in a center based day care program (Greene, 1975). Their parents received special training in their homes on topics such as child rearing practices and how to develop educational materials at home. Parents were also provided with educational materials and toys. Training was provided in the child's

dominant language. In both programs significant gains were noted in children's language skills, numerical concepts, and social skills, but the contribution of the parent training program to these results could not be assessed.

The Austin Independent School District, Texas, (1977, 1981) developed learning activities and trained language minority parents to use these activities at home with their children. Parents minimally provided their children with two fifteen-minute learning activities each week. Group sessions were also available to parents to discuss and exchange ideas for home learning activities. Students made significant gains in English and Spanish language skills, but again, the contribution of the parent education could not be assessed.

McConnel (1976) reports a study in which paraprofessional aides provided bilingual multi-cultural educational activities to the children of migrant seasonal farm-workers. Project staff followed the families around and worked with local school personnel. Parents took part in all aspects of the program management--hiring and firing personnel, establishing financial policy, evaluating, and instructing. Once again, the students made significant progress in math, reading, language skills, and cultural heritage although the contribution of the parent training component to these outcomes could not be determined.

In marked contrast to other studies, the Community Education Center (El Centro Educativo de la Comunidad) in Redwood City, California, designed a project where the relative contribution of parent training could be evaluated. Instruction in the school and home was provided in both English and Spanish by trained teachers and aides who were also members of the community. Teachers visited homes, taught parents basic child development principles, and trained them in specific learning activities. Children were divided into three groups. Children in group one attended preschool three days per week and were visited by a teacher at home once a week. Children in group two attended preschool five days a week, but were visited at home only once a month. Children in group three did not attend preschool, but received a weekly home visit. Children in all three groups realized significant growth. Children in groups two and three realized comparable growth, which means that children who only had a weekly home lesson with mother and teacher did as well as children who attended school five days a week. Obviously, a great deal can be accomplished by parents at home with an organized program at a potentially lower cost than existing preschool programs.

No other research on the involvement of language minority parents is available. We can glean from these few studies, however, that language minority parents want their children to be educated and will actively participate in this process when shown how they can help. We can also surmise that school personnel do not understand the concerns and the contributions that these parents can make to the education of their children. The lack of communication between the home and school, then, is a major

barrier that must be addressed. If a successful home-school partnership is to occur, the communication barrier between language minority parents and school personnel must be addressed and overcome.

A review of studies in parent involvement in general reveals that the issues noted above are not unique to language minority parents. Issues of involvement and communication appear to be generic parent involvement issues. The following highlights research that appears particularly relevant to the concern for fostering a home-school partnership between language minority parents and school personnel.

GENERAL FINDINGS SUPPORTING PARENT INVOLVEMENT

Research over the last two decades consistently provides evidence that when parents are interested in the schooling of their children, their children develop attitudes and behaviors that are critical for school success. Some of the critical questions and answers follow.

Is social class a factor in parents' interest in their children's schooling?

No. Working class parents are just as involved in the raising of their children as are parents from other social classes (Topping, 1986). Studies demonstrate that although working class parents are not as involved in school activities due to both parents holding one or more jobs, they express as much interest in their children's progress as do middle-class parents (Newson & Newson, 1977).

Many studies of parent involvement conclude that practically any kind of parent participation has a positive affect on student achievement, especially in minority and low-income schools (Henderson, 1981; Moles, 1982; Linney, 1983; Henderson, et. al., 1986; de Kanter, et. al., 1986). Current research has begun to identify specific attitudes and behaviors in families that result in improved student performance (de Kanter, et. al., 1986).

Is family background critical for success in school?

Yes. Coleman (1966) concludes in his study of *Equality of Educational Opportunity* that family background is one of the most important factors in a child's education, over and above such things as class size or teacher credentials. Nedler and McAfee reviewed the 1966 Coleman Report and concluded that "differences in school facilities and curricula are not significantly related to school achievement. The most important single factor in achievement is the home background of the child and fellow students" (1979, p.19). Mize (1977) reviews independent research studies and concludes that from 50 to 85 percent of the variance in achievement scores, I.Q, or verbal ability is attributable to family characteristics.

Several studies find that a child's family and home environment are even more important to academic achievement than teacher or school related variables is confirmed by several studies (Dobson & Dobson, 1975; Mize, 1977; Nedler & McAfee, 1979; Schaefer, 1971; Walberg & Marjoribanks, 1976; Topping, 1986). Schaefer in particular concludes from research findings that "schools do not change the child's level of intellectual functioning, they merely educate him at the level of functioning established and maintained by the family and the community" (1971, p. 18).

How do parents help with the schooling of their children?

Coleman's finding that schools have limited impact upon student achievement is still being debated, but the importance of the child's home experience to later school achievement is widely accepted. Most of the studies examining the relationship between school achievement and family characteristics are correlational. As such they do not lead to conclusions of cause and effect. However, many studies do identify factors in the home that can be modified, and which may contribute to success in school (Gotts & Purnell, 1986).

Topping (1986) reports a study by Cochran that demonstrated that pre-school children received more stimulation from their homes than they did from a professionally run day care center. Others have documented that working class parents provide stimulating learning environments for their children, offering, for example, greater verbal stimulation than teachers, which is conducive to greater cognitive growth (Phinney & Feshback, 1980; Tizard, et.al., 1982; Tizard & Hughes, 1984).

Wane and Garber found that parents who structured reading time and provided children with reading materials in the home were strong predictors of student achievement (Dobson & Dobson, 1975). They concluded that learning activities in the home could contribute to success in school.

Kifer (1976) found that 10 year-olds tend to read for pleasure when their parents encourage them to read and do well in school. He also reports another study by Crandall and Batle which demonstrates how certain parental behaviors are associated with the willingness and efforts of students to study.

Brock (1976) reports that studies outside the United States also demonstrate a direct relationship between the amount of parent involvement and the amount of achievement by children. "The amount of parental involvement in the child's education may explain up to four times as much of the variance in the child's intelligence and achievement scores at age eleven as is explained by the quality of schools (p. 11)." In a conclusion, reminiscent of Coleman (1966), a national study in England of over 5,000 children states that the degree of "parent interest and involvement in their child's education is more important than the quality of schools

even after statistically allowing for family SES factors (Schaefer, 1971, p.19)." The importance of parental involvement to student success in school is confirmed by other large scale British studies (Plowden, 1967; Bullock, 1975; Court, 1976; Taylor, 1977; and Warnock, 1978).

Iverson and Walberg (1980) in a review of more than 18 studies of over 5,000 children from over 8 countries concluded that parent stimulation of the child in the family showed a consistently stronger relationship with intelligence, motivation, and achievement than did measures of SES.

Furthermore, Epstein and McPartland (1977) found that student involvement in family decision making is associated with positive personality development and better school coping skills. In the same vein, Mize (1977) reviews research which finds that when their parents have positive attitudes toward school, students tend to be more socially and emotionally adjusted and to achieve better than do students whose parents do not hold such views.

Studies to date typically examine the relationship of family characteristics and student achievement. In a review of these studies, Scott-Jones (1984) identified family characteristics that affect children's achievement in school. These characteristics fall into three categories: physical characteristics (i.e., genetic endowment, family size, nutrition, and health care), SES characteristics (i.e., parent education and employment), and parent/child interactions (i.e., patterns of family communication, parent-child activities, and expectations of school performance). Scott-Jones does not discuss the relative importance of these characteristics, but appears to weight each family characteristic equally. Other researchers identify some family characteristics as more important for success than others.

Clark (1984) found that regardless of whether they came from a two-parent or single-parent home or from poor or middle class families, children who were successful came from families that: 1) stressed the importance of education, 2) stressed the importance of academic achievement, 3) expressed a sense of self-determination over their lives, 4) frequently talked about school, 5) reinforced schoolwork and student interest in learning, and 6) had regular routines and mealtimes, and encouraged good use of time and space.

Bloom (1980) concluded that social class was not as critical to student learning as were how parents developed their children's language skills, exhorted their children to do well in school, held high expectations for their children, helped their children with their work and helped their children to organize their time. These factors are associated with higher achievement in reading, vocabulary, and problem solving.

Another re-analysis of Coleman's data concluded that families influence the achievement of children in three ways (Mayeske, 1973). Expectations for academic

performance is one of the most important factors. If students see themselves as learners and their parents expect them to learn, students learn. Second, families that actively engage their children in activities supporting learning raise children who are more successful than those from families that are not so engaged. Third, students from families that view hard work as necessary for success are more successful than those students from families who do not have this attitude. These studies also suggest that how the family interacts is more critical for school success than social class or income.

Henderson (1981) reports research evidence that suggests that parents who see themselves as unimportant and powerless have children who do not do well in school. But if these parents become involved in the schooling of their children, their attitudes as well as those of their children change. Their children learn to view themselves and school more positively and as a result do better in school.

In sum, while the relationship between the family characteristics noted above and student achievement has not been conclusively measured, evidence shows that how family members communicate with one another may be more important to student achievement than other family characteristics such as size, parent education, or SES (Linney and Vernberg, 1983). Other research literature suggests that what is communicated is also critical. Parents directly influence the performance of their children in four areas: values, behavior in school, use of time, and access to educational resources outside the school (de Kanter, 1986). Sinclair and Ghory (1980) argue that whereas schools cannot change the cultural backgrounds or SES of families, they can help families improve the home learning environment to better prepare children for school.

How involved should parents be?

Retrospective studies to identify why some children did better in school than others found that, regardless of socio-economic status, children from homes in which their parents involved them in educational activities did better in school than children who were not so involved (Benson, et. al., 1980; Rankin, 1967).

The earlier that parents become involved in supporting the schooling of their children, the greater the benefits to the child. Both Bronfenbrenner (1974) and Radin (1972) found that early intervention can facilitate long-term gains in cognitive growth only if mothers become actively involved in their children's learning. Preschool enrichment programs that only focus on children are not as effective as those that also include an active role for mothers.

Mowry (1972) compared the achievement of children from homes in which the degree of involvement of their parents in school differed. He found that those children from homes in which parents were involved in a variety of roles (e.g., tutors, advisory

council member, classroom aides, etc.) showed greater gains than children from homes in which the roles of parents were limited. These findings have been confirmed by other studies examining the effects of different levels of parent involvement (Boulder Valley, 1975; Gillum, 1977; Radin, 1969; Woods, 1974; Rich, 1976; Gross, 1974; Gordon, 1978; Herman & Yen, 1980; Wellsich, 1976; and Matuszek, 1977).

Gordon (1978) asserts that every role in which a parent can participate is important. The more deeply and the longer that the parent can become involved, the greater the benefits to the teachers, the programs, the schools, the parents, and ultimately, the children. Studies since the 1970's show that children at all grade levels learn more when the family is involved with their schooling (Clark, 1983). When parents are actively involved, the morale of teachers increases, curricular activities are enriched, positive publicity and public relations for the school are realized, legislation and standards for schools and students are promoted, and parents understand their own needs and the needs of their children better (Moler, 1958; Ryan, 1964; Schiff, 1963).

Of the various roles in which parents can participate, parents as tutors may be most effective. Rich (1987), in a review of the effectiveness of various models of parent involvement, concludes that those in which parents tutor their own children are the most promising. She arrives at this conclusion for several reasons. First, over the last two decades research has consistently found a direct link between parent involvement and improved academic achievement. Second, of all the models for parent participation, tutoring offers the greatest opportunity for widespread and sustained involvement because parents can see the difference they are making. Third, the most basic motivation for involvement is parents' desire to help their own children do better in school.

Goodson and Hess (1975) assessed the relative effectiveness of different models of parent involvement upon the achievement and growth of children. They concluded that those programs in which parents were tutors produced immediate gains in children's IQ scores and altered the teaching behavior of parents in a manner more consistent with the teaching behaviors used in school.

There is evidence that training parents as tutors leads to strong positive attitudes toward school (McKinney, 1975; Rich, et. al., 1979). For instance, the performance of low achieving students was greater when their parents were trained as tutors than that of low achieving students whose parents did not receive such training (Hofmeister, 1977; McKinney, 1975).

When parents in one study received training in both a group and individual setting, such training accounted for 25 percent of the variance in their children's reading comprehension scores (Mize, 1977). Moreover, the accuracy in oral reading and

reading comprehension was greater among children whose parents had received such training than among children whose parents had not been trained.

Gillum, Schooley, and Novak (1977) found that when schools offered parent workshops that provided specific activities in which parents could help their children at home, their children did better in school than those children whose parents were not provided with such focused training.

An important related benefit to training parents as tutors is the increased communication with parents. Schiff (1963) assessed the effect of personal contacts on parent attitudes towards and participation in school. He found that as parent participation increased, so did student reading achievement and attendance. Study habits improved while the severity and frequency of student behavior problems decreased. Ryan (1964) also found that student reading achievement increased as the participation of parents in schooling increased. This finding is consistent with Walberg's findings that students whose parents communicated and were actively involved with teachers did twice as well in reading than did students whose parents and teachers were not as involved (Boger, et. al., 1978).

As Gotts and Purnell (1986) note, there have been few studies of parent involvement at the secondary level. Those studies that have been done expect that parents at the secondary level should participate in schools in much the same way as do parents at the elementary level, i.e. physically present at school. Secondary school teachers sometimes interpret the lack of parent presence in high schools as indicating a lack of parent concern for education (Henderson, 1986). These interpretations by researchers and teachers fail to recognize the changing needs of secondary students for independence and the concomitant changes in parenting roles and responsibilities. Consequently the outcome measure of high degree of physical presence of parents in schools may not be age or grade level appropriate indicators of parent involvement at the secondary level. However, there are other ways parents of secondary students can be more involved in school.

McDill (1969) reports one study of over twenty public high schools that found that the degree of parent and community interest in a good education affected student achievement and goals. An NCES study (1985) found that high school students across SES levels performed better in school when their parents kept close tabs on their school work and whereabouts. An NIE study of 28 parent involvement programs serving upper elementary and secondary schools documented that such involvement increased school attendance, academic achievement, improved student behavior, and increased parent confidence in schooling their children (Collins, et. al., 1982).

In sum, the earlier that parents become involved with the schooling of their children, the more comprehensive and the longer lasting their involvement, the stronger and

more positive will be the effects upon their children. Most importantly, these positive effects will occur regardless of social class or income.

What is needed to facilitate parent involvement in schools?

Research and experience point to the need for more and better communication between the home and school. Keeves (1975) concluded that increases in the communication between home and school, as well as increases in positive attitude and interest of parents towards school and achievement were in turn associated with increased student achievement.

Researchers in England have also documented the importance of continuity between the school and home to the achievement of children (Wolfendale, 1985). Smith (1984) in examining the attitudes of preschool staff toward parent involvement concludes that staff feel very strongly that continuity and shared experiences between the home and school are critical to student success. Having information about and access to the child's home is important in designing an appropriate educational program.

Tizard, et. al., (1981) document a range of activities in which parents can help their children. In light of his own research and that of others, Tizard (Tizard and Hughes, 1984) asserts that the role of the home in facilitating the cognitive and learning processes of children needs to be reassessed and calls for better and closer coordination of home and school activities for maximum benefit for children.

Within this framework for better coordination, a national study in England, "Services for Families with Young Children," has been implemented with the aims of: 1) exploring the extent to which services for families with children under five are planned, implemented and delivered in partnership with those families for whom they are intended, 2) identifying and examining a number of initiatives in which a working partnership is achieved between parents and workers in the health, education, social service, and voluntary sectors, and 3) disseminating information and promoting discussion of parent-professional partnerships (Wolfendale, 1985). The trend in parent training in England appears to have gone from one in which educators tell parents what to do, to one in which parents and educators become equal partners in the schooling of children.

Smith (1984) reminds us that child achievement is not the only benefit from such a parent/teacher partnership. Parents gain confidence in their role as parents, teachers view the families of their students more positively, children develop increased positive attitudes toward self and school, and parents and teachers provide better care and support for children. The value of these additional benefits from such a parent-teacher partnership should not be overlooked.

Conclusion. There are many reasons why parents of language minority children are not actively involved in their education, however parents have participated successfully when efforts were made to involve them. Many research studies correlate school success with specific family behaviors and attitudes. Parents can and have learned behaviors such as talking to their children about school and reading with them as a result of parent involvement programs. Parent involvement also correlates highly with student success and is facilitated by improved communication between school and home leading to a sense of partnership between parents and school staff.

The key to any effort involve parents are the concepts of communication, coordination and partnership. Parents have to be part of the process rather than have their roles merely defined for them.

Chapter 4
CREATING A HOME SCHOOL PARTNERSHIP

A successful home school partnership is more than a parent involvement program because it requires on ongoing relationship between parents and the school during the child's entire education. While research studies conclude that parent involvement is important, few examine this role in detail. How parents and schools affect one another has not been systematically studied.

Consequently, there is little information to guide educators seeking to develop and maintain a partnership with parents. More attention has been given to characteristics of successful parent involvement programs, which are listed below and which will be reviewed in turn.

* A successful home-school partnership must include effective home-school communication.
* Parent involvement programs should specify clear objectives.
* Parent involvement programs should reflect parent concerns and skills.
* Parent involvement programs should include all grade levels.
* Parent involvement programs should differ by grade level.
* At the elementary level, parent involvement programs should train parents as tutors.
* At the high school level, schools should train parents as partners in the academic and career guidance of their children.

A successful home-school partnership must include effective home-school communication

Communication is the primary and necessary ingredient for implementing an effective parent/teacher partnership. It underlies all discussions of what is needed for a successful parent involvement program.

Gotts and Purnell (1986) argue that communication between the home and school is critical for an effective and successful home-school partnership. They report ample evidence that increasing the frequency and quality of communication between the home and school dramatically increases school attendance (Duncan, 1969; Parker & McCoy, 1977; Sheats & Dunkleberger, 1979; Shelton & Dobson, 1973), improves student achievement (Bittle, 1975; Duncan, 1969; Shelton & Dobson, 1973) and

increases the number of school contacts that parents initiate on their own (Bittle, 1975; Duncan, 1965; Mager, 1980; Parker & McCoy, 1977).

As many teachers know, communicating with the home can be more effective in improving the performance and behavior of children than communicating with the students directly. One study found that counselors could be more effective in dealing with certain student problems when working with parents than with students (Hayes, et. al., 1977). Another study concluded that when parents were provided with more feedback than quarterly report cards about their children's performance, student behavior improved dramatically (Barth, 1979). Edlund (1969) found across all grade levels that a simple daily checklist of required student activities and whether they were completed effectively helped parents reinforce teachers and school work. Increased communications between parents and the school becomes self-reinforcing: "...literature suggests that once a system of regular communication between the home and school is begun, home-school contacts increase," (Gotts & Purnell, 1986, p.169). Better and more frequent communication between the home and school increases the probability that parents and teachers can coordinate and compliment their efforts to maximize the schooling of children (Fairchild, 1976).

The need for improved communication is even more acute between language minority parents and school personnel due to barriers of language and culture. While language minority parents value education for their children, they often hold negative views toward school. However, as a result of increased communication, their attitude toward school becomes more positive.

The areas in which language minority parents can help their children are independent of language, SES, and income levels. Therefore, with good communication between the school and the home, all parents can learn how to help their children.

School personnel on the other hand, observe the low involvement of language minority parents, and mistakenly perceive that these parents do not value education. However, when school personnel reach out and effectively communicate with these parents, they gain more accurate information, and in the process they enrich the instructional options for children, feel better about their role as teachers, and bring about more of a sense of community between the school and their students' homes.

Epstein (1986) in discussing the implications of parent involvement research for parents of language minority children suggests that parent involvement programs must take into account the English proficiency of the parents, address the concerns of all the parents, and provide a range of activities in which parents can participate according to their concerns and abilities. She offers a "modest proposal...to change the words of the Lau decision to reflect the results of research on parent involvement to state: Where the inability of parents of school children to speak and understand the English language excludes the children from effective participation in the education

program, the school district must take affirmative steps to open its instructional program to these parents and their children (1986, p. 14-15)." In short, school personnel must be able to communicate with parents.

A lack of communication between the home and school can occur whenever there is a perceived difference between teachers and the community. Gotts and Purnell present a study of Appalachian families by Spriggs that concluded that "teachers and parents do not seem to be coordinating and communicating well about student learning....Parents feel teachers are not interested (1986, p. 173)." Spriggs found that the schools tend not to include parents and that conferences between parents and teachers are not seen as useful. The responses of both parents and teachers eloquently conveyed a feeling of mistrust.

Lightfoot (1980) argues that distrust between parents and teachers results from a lack of understanding and misperceptions of one another. She reports that the lower-class black families value education as much as do teachers. Because both parents and teachers misperceive one another, they fail to recognize that they share this common value. Moreover, they fail to recognize that each has skills and valuable contributions to make in the schooling of children (Rich, 1987).

While communication is a skill central to the educational process, training in communication is not a general requirement for educators. All personnel completing a credential in education are assumed to communicate effectively. Yet the extent to which teachers communicate effectively with students has come under scrutiny. Understanding how teachers communicate with students may help us understand how teachers approach communication with parents.

At one extreme, communication between students and teachers is controlled exclusively by the teacher. For example, researchers assert that many learning disabilities, especially among language minority students, are pedagogically induced in that the intensive instruction they receive confines them to a passive role and induces a form of "learned helplessness (Cummins, 1986, p.10)." Such intensive instruction often has the teacher correcting student responses and/or controlling the type of responses to such an extent that the learning process is severely interrupted or impaired (Ramphal, 1983).

Two major pedagogical approaches can be identified by the extent to which the teacher maintains control over classroom interaction. As described by Cummins, in the "transmission model" the teacher imparts knowledge or skills to students who do not yet have these skills. This implies that the teacher initiates and controls the interaction, constantly orienting it towards the achievement of instructional objectives (1986, p.11)." The result of such an approach is that student responses are few and tend to be limited to information recall and lower level cognitive skill functioning. This model is characteristic not only of mainstream classrooms but of classrooms in which

teachers have been specially trained to meet the needs of language minority students (Ramirez, et. al., 1988).

In contrast, the "reciprocal interaction" model uses communication (i.e., talking and writing) as the means to learning. The teacher guides and facilitates student learning by encouraging student dialogue. This model encourages the student to develop and use higher cognitive and language skills. In short, students become active participants in their own learning. Of these two models, the Transmission Model is dominant in the United States (Barnes, 1976; Wells, 1982; Cummins, 1986).

Because teachers in the U.S. are trained in the non-interactive pedagogy, they are used to a communication style that does not lend itself to establishing a partnership with parents. A partnership requires participants to regard one another as equals, each contributing something of comparable value, albeit from different contexts. Each member is important and needs to be considered.

Therefore, it is difficult for teachers to communicate effectively with parents without specialized training (Gotts, 1979; Nedler & McAfee, 1979). In addition to training, teachers need to have a voice in developing parent involvement programs or else they may not want to be involved. Similarly, parents will not become involved in a home-school partnership unless they feel that it will be meaningful and based on their needs (Nedler & McAfee, 1979).

Gotts and Purnell (1986) conclude that parents value education for their children and that they are interested in learning ways in which the can help their children succeed in school. Regardless of income or education, parents will actively participate in schools when they are given a meaningful opportunity to do so in ways they perceive as beneficial to their children. Even so, parent involvement will not occur without special effort by school staff. Principals must make their support of parent involvement clear. All staff must be trained to communicate effectively with parents. "There appears to be much to be learned in the art of communication skills on the part of both school personnel and parents before school-family relationships can be more meaningful and effective" (Gotts & Purnell, 1986).

Parent involvement programs should specify clear objectives

Program objectives provide a focus for all activities and are critical for determining program success. Ideally, parent involvement program objectives should reflect parent needs (Landerholme, E. & Karr, J., 1988). They should involve a common understanding between parents and teachers of what their children need. Arriving at such a consensus requires strong communication skills. Accordingly, Gotts and Purnell (1986) hold that while clearly specified program objectives is one of the most important requirements for an effective parent involvement program, specialized training in communication for teachers is equally important. This communication

training is needed to help them better work with parents so that together they can identify program objectives. Only in this collaborative process will the objectives reflect the interests and needs of key participants in a given program.

Because parent involvement is assumed to be a good thing, it often becomes a goal in itself without anyone asking the questions why or what for. As a result, many parent involvement programs lack clear objectives. Parents are supposed to be involved, they are supposed to attend meetings and serve on committees, but there is no stated goal or desired end result (Heck, 1977).

Another cause of many vague efforts to involve parents is the requirement of many federal programs that parents be consulted or that an advisory group be formed. In that case, the goal for involving parents may be an external goal--to satisfy requirements for funding--rather than an internal goal that is an integral part of the educational program (Rodriguez, 1974). While many benefits are expected from parent participation, a pro-forma parent involvement program can have negative effects. Parents may feel that their opinions are not respected by the school or they may feel coerced to participate in roles that have been defined for them in exchange for their children's participation in a special program.

Ideally, parents' participation should reflect parents' own needs (Landerholme, E. & Karr, J., 1988) and should involve a common understanding between parents and teachers of what their children need. Therefore, according to Gotts and Purnell (1986), the two most important requirements for effective parent involvement are 1) communication and collaboration between parents and teachers and 2) clearly specified objectives identified and agreed to by parents and teachers. Only in this way will the objectives reflect the interests and needs of key participants in a specific program.

Parent involvement programs should reflect parent concerns and skills

Turnbull and Turnbull (1982) reviewed parent involvement programs and services and found them to reflect more the views of what policy makers or advocates feel parents should be doing than what parents themselves feel is important. By contrast, they recommend that an effective parent involvement program should provide parents with a range of choices for involvement that are based on the priorities of parents.

Similarly, Topping (1986) notes that any parent involvement program should focus on the unique contributions that parents make to the development of their children. That is, parent involvement activities should build upon the skills parents have and use with their children naturally, and should be based on the needs and values that parents have.

Parent involvement programs should include all grade levels

The more varied and longer lasting the involvement of parents, the more significant the effect upon student success in school. The parent involvement program therefore should provide for parents of all children at every grade level according to the children's changing needs as they move through the curriculum.

The more varied and longer lasting the involvement of parents, the more significant the effect upon student success in school (Gordon, 1978). Therefore, parents should continue to be involved in their children's education as they move up the grade levels.

In reality, this is not the case. Parent participation is most prevalent in elementary school and is all but absent at the secondary level. According to Henderson, Marbuger and Ooms (1986) and Berger (1987), different roles are appropriate at different grade levels. It may be because certain roles for parents are ignored or not developed that participation declines as students get older.

At the secondary level, students need parents to be supporters and advisors, a role that parents can play more effectively if they have support and ready access to information from the school. With or without involvement from the school, parents have a role in helping their children make the transition from school to further education, training, and ultimately work. Ideally, this role should be coordinated with school counseling and guidance efforts. Those concerned with stemming the disproportionate dropout rate of Hispanic students have suggested the involvement of parents as an essential tool (Hispanic Policy Development Project, 1984. Ramon, G., 1985). The logic is simple: if the parents are committed to the school and share its goals, students are not as likely to drop out.

Finally, student success in school is related to many parent and family behaviors and interactions. This influence will not stop because a student gets older, so there is a continued need to recognize the importance of the parents and support their role in this area.

Parent involvement programs should differ by grade level

Just as the needs of children change as grade level changes, so parent roles and responsibilities change accordingly. Because they reflect these differences in child and parent needs, parent involvement programs will look different at different grade levels.

On the first day of kindergarten or first grade, children are there because their parents brought them. Communication about the logistics of the school year takes place between school staff and parents who are the crucial partners in the whole enterprise. As children begin to learn basic skills and begin to work in classrooms with 20 to 30

of their peers, there is much that parents can do to help them. Parents can develop skills at home that are essential to classroom success--skills like communication, looking up information, and problem solving. Parents can also foster attitudes that are equally important such as curiosity, responsibility, and perserverence. In addition, parents can tutor young children in reading, math and other basic subjects.

As students move to junior high and high school, their school world becomes more complicated and the responsibility for dealing with it increasingly falls on the students. They are told where to report for classes, may be given classes to select, and are allowed to make decisions which will affect their education and work options for years to come. While the school may continue to inform parents of the logistics of the school year and of the decisions faced by students, if the parents do nothing in most cases the education of the students continues regardless. Parents are also less likely to be effective tutors of their children whose school subjects may now include classes like chemistry, foreign language, autobody repair, or word processing which parents may not know anything about.

While the parents' direct responsibility may lessen in order to allow the students to develop their own sense of responsibility, parents of secondary students should be involved in class selection and in the educational and career guidance of their children. Parent participation is important because many junior high students are not prepared to make decisions which will affect their eligibility for college and consequently for a whole range of occupations. School guidance staff need parents' help and involvement because they are responsible for hundreds of students. Parents who are not familiar with the American education system may need information and guidance themselves so that they can participate effectively.

What parents do at home with their children is important all through the grades. While younger children may be helped with their work, the work of older children can be monitored and their efforts encouraged. Parent attitudes towards school, work, and success will continue to be important to the adolescent. The home can continue to be an arena for children to learn and practice skills which will be useful in school, but the skills will change from simple tasks to more adult responsibilities.

Good parent involvement programs will always reflect the needs of the communities in which they are located, but one can expect that programs at the elementary level will involve parents in a more visible partner role with the school and parents as teachers of their own children. Programs at the secondary level, on the other hand, involve parents in the educational and career decision-making required of all students, and support parents in their roles of monitors and supporters of their children's educational effort. All through the grades, parents can participate at the school as collaborators, supporting resources, and in policy roles.

At the elementary level, parent involvement programs should train parents as tutors

As a result of this literature review, it is clear that one of the most overlooked ways to involve parents is to train and organize them as tutors of their own children. The advantage of this form of parent involvement is that every child gets attention that can have an impact on his or her school success.

Current research supports the belief that all parents can help their children succeed in school, regardless of their own educational and language skills. All parents want to help their children, although they may not know how to go about it or believe that they have the skills that are needed. In that case, parents depend on the teachers and the school to do the right thing for their children, an attitude which in many cases is unrealistic given the numbers of children in public school.

Teachers can increase their effectiveness and share responsibility for student success with parents by reinforcing parents' self-confidence and showing them specific activities that they can do with their children. Ideally, parents will be able to select from a variety of activities those that they find most helpful and interesting. Experimental programs involving language minority parents in home tutoring activities found a very high rate of parent participation, so the parents are obviously interested and willing.

At the secondary school level, parent involvement programs should train parents as partners in the academic and career guidance of their children

At the secondary level, the ratio of counselors to students is typically 1 to 250 or more. In some schools, one counselor may serve as many as 600 students, while in other schools there are no counselors at all. Yet students as early as junior high school need to make important decisions with lifelong consequences about their academic and occupational futures. The educational system depends upon parents to be the backseat coaches providing students with a great deal of information from their own experience. However, for many students, such as those from language minority backgrounds, this system does not work as their parents are unfamiliar with the American education system. The school must therefore inform the parents thoroughly about the educational options available to their children and the career/occupational implications of each decision. In this way, parents can become informed and participating partners in all further educational decisions.

Conclusion. A promising and neglected means of increasing the achievement of language minority students is through involving their parents. While language minority parents have the same needs and aspirations as other parents, attempts to involve them must take into account their unique needs and history.

The primary goal for involving language minority parents has often been to satisfy program requirements, but a successful parent involvement strategy must pay attention to parents' own needs. Besides being able to communicate with the school in a language they can understand, parents need to be able to form relationships with school staff which are respectful of their culture, interests, and needs. In addition, they are likely to need information about the educational system, reassurance that they can contribute in important ways to their children's education, and practical training in how to do so. When approached from the perspective of developing a partnership, parents are eager to collaborate with the school.

There are many possible roles for parents from classroom aide to schoolboard member, but the most promising way to reach the most parents and help the most students, is to involve parents in working with their own children at home in ways that support the school program. Certain behaviors and attitudes of families correlate highly with student success, and many of these can be learned. For example, parents can be encouraged to talk to their children about school and to listen to them read. An important ingredient is the sense of empowerment that parents gain when they are validated in the importance of their role.

Successful parent involvement programs develop real partnerships between parents and the schools in which communication is a key. These programs have clear objectives which reflect parent concerns and skills. While parent involvement may differ by grade level, it is needed throughout a child's educational career. At the elementary level, a most promising role for parents is to involve them in tutoring their own children and being conscious of their role as their children's first teacher. At the secondary level, there is a need for parents to be active partners in the academic and career guidance of their children in order to assure high school graduation and help them to make the transition to further education and/or work.

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